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ABSTRACT

After a brief discussion of group games as resources for international understanding, this paper provides guidelines for discussing cultural games with children. Twelve games for students between 7 and 12 years of age are described. Games were selected for inclusion because they were: (1) generally cooperative in nature; (2) authentic and representative of a variety of cultures; (3) developmentally appropriate; (4) minimal in requirements for equipment and preparation; (5) rich in opportunities to compare cultural values; and (6) safe and enjoyable to play. Aboriginal, New Guinean, African, Guatamalan, Caribou Eskimoan, Congolese, Chinese, Icelandic, Mongolian, Jewish, Inuit Eskimoan, and international games are represented: Kotaut Mina Mieta, Evanena (Looking down the Pole), Boa Constrictor, Pin, Together-Air Ball (Collective Score Volleyball), Antelope in the Net, Helping Harvest the Land, In-and-Out-the-Windows, Yurt Circle, Spin the Dreidel, and Hopscotch. Citations are provided for 10 children's game books. (RH)

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# CHILDREN'S GAMES: RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

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CHILDREN'S GAMES: RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

In our constant search for imaginative and appropriate ways to help children learn about themselves, others, and their world, we should not overlook games and children's propensity for playing them.

Games or their variations have been played for centuries from Scandinavia to Africa and from Tibet to Trinidad. In fact, evidence of games such as hopscotch have been found in the ruins of the Roman Forum. Games and even songs and rhymes move as easily as folktale or legend across language barriers, space and time.

Children's games are an interesting social phenomenon. Their inventiveness and variety are overwhelming, and their durability is uncanny. Some children's games still current today were played when Rome was young. Minor details may change, but the games remain basically the same from one generation to the next. Also, children's games reflect with accuracy both current and past situations, providing an index to the folkways of a certain time and place.

In the past, adults played games at celebrations, festivals, and parties. At times, they played with their families at the end of a work day on the town square or village green. Group games were often a part of religious

rituals, and many evolved from traditions associated with work such as hunting, farming, food preparation, or soldiering. Chance, physical strength, and strategy became elements typical or more complex games played by adults and older children. Young children learned game rules, rituals, and traditions as they observed and played with their families.

## Group Games as Resources for International Understanding

Can group games promote international understanding? Nickell and Kennedy(1987) report "From games . . . students can learn much about the characteristics that make cultures unique." (p. 1) Play is universal. It is also culturally specific. It is a form of cultural expression, and it reveals the values of the society from which it comes. (Nickell and Kennedy, 1987)

Interestingly, Thomas Collins (1982), the Director of the National Association for Elementary School Principal's International Understanding in Elementary Schools Project, suggests to promote global understandings "games and other physical education activities should not be limited to those from our own culture." (p. 17) Similarly, Kenneth Wulff (1987) recommends the use of dance, creative movement, and games to enable students to develop a global perspective. And he suggests, "Developing experiences in cross-cultural situations will allow students to learn basic skills of participation." (p. 415) He further recommends bringing

international students into the classroom to demonstrate these activities. (p. 420)

Although teachers know the value of group games, many object to the competitive nature of many cultural games and rightly so. Competitive games for preschool children are inappropriate. (Bogdonoff and Dolch, 1979) Opie and Opie (1969) report, however, that competitive games for older children are natural activities in the street and on the playground. Piaget (1962) underlines the values of playing games. He believes games support the development of thought processes and moral judgment that emerge during the concrete operational period. The games to which Piaget refers require cooperation and coordination or collaboration among players as they address both game rules and a strategy for playing. Kamii (1980) further suggests the harm and the benefits of competitive group games lies not in winning itself, but in what people do with winning. She believes Piaget's theory demonstrates that competition in games is part of a bigger developmental picture from egocentricity to increasing ability to decenter and coordinate points of view. "This developmental process can be seen not only in games but also in moral judgments, language, classification, conservation, the construction of a spatiotemporal framework, and causality." (p.200) Kamii suggests the way to handle competition in games with children is to handle winning in a casual way. She recommends the following guidelines:

(1). Verbalize that is it OK to lose

(2). Allow children to avoid competition by observing if they so choose.

(3). Play games of chance in which winning depends almost completely on luck. (p. 199)

Kamii further believes games foster autonomy and have the advantage of involving physical action that encourages children to be mentally active.

Finally, it is important to note that not all group games emphasize competition. Many games from other cultures promote the value of cooperation, for example, "Pelele" from Spain and "Pin" from Guatemala. In fact, most group games from China, New Guinea and the Eskimo culture place an emphasis on accomplishing a common goal.

## Discussing Cultural Games with Children

Teachers may select a balance of both cooperative and competitive games in the intermediate grades for the classroom and in the process discuss with children the value as well as cultural reasons for each game. For example, "Kotaut Mine Mieta" from Australia emphasizes the ability to proficiently hit a moving target. (See description) The following questions would be useful to ask children after they have played the game:

"What might the moving target symbolize to someone in the outback of Australia?"

"Could this be something adults do which children have copied or imitated? Can you give an example(s)?"

"Can this game improve one's skill in hitting a target? How?"

"Can you identify a similar game from another culture which emphasizes these skills?"

"How is our own game of 'dodge ball' similar and yet different from this game?"

"Kotaut Mine Mieta" is a child's game which imitates the way Aborigines hunt for food. The above questions and similar ones we believe may enable children to understand from a cultural perspective the value of games and the 'why' of the skills and actions they emphasize. As Nickell and Kennedy (1987) suggest, games are culturally specific. Interestingly, if games are examined from this frame of reference, they provide rich insights into the culture and the values of the society from which they originate.

## Sample Games for Students Ages 7-12

The following games have been included in this article because they meet specific criteria: they are generally cooperative in nature; they are authentic and representative of a variety of culture; they are developmentally appropriate for pupils 7-12; they require a minimum of equipment and preparation; they offer opportunities to compare cultural values; and they are safe and enjoyable to play.

## Kotaut Mina Mieta

A primary concern of individuals in any culture is the acquisition of food, clothing, and shelter. This game emphasizes the ability to proficiently hit a moving target. This is a necessary skill for the aborigine hunter. Aborigine children start early in their play to imitate the activity of their elders.

Space Required

Outdoor play area or gymnasium

Appropriate for ages 7-12

Equipment Needed

1 Tetherball and several playground balls

Directions

Divide class into two groups and form two parallel lines. The two lines should face one another and should be spaced approximately 10 yards apart. This distance may be too great for some groups and may be modified.

Select a player to pull the tetherball down the center of the lines between the two groups.

As the tetherball travels between the groups, the students standing in line should attempt to hit the tetherball with their playground balls.

Balls may be retrieved and thrown again.

It is helpful if the student pulling the tetherball starts slowly. After passing between the groups, the speed of travel may be increased.

Ball handlers should be cautioned to throw only at the tetherball.

(Nickell and Kennedy 1987)

Evanena

(Looking Down tne Pole)

This game is played by the peaceful and cooperative Motu and Tangu people of New Guinea.

Space Required

Grassy playground or open area classroom with mats or rugs

Appropriate for ages 8-12

Equipment Needed

None

Directions

Children should kneel in two rows facing each other. Arms should be joined to form a platform.

One child should stand on the arms of the last two in the line and walk forward across the joined arms of the others.

As he/she moves along the platform, the children who are passed should run to the front of the line and continue to extend the platform as the walker progresses.

The game continues until the walker falls or the children tire.

(Orlick 1978)

## Boa Constrictor

This is an African folk game, and it is similar to "Catch the Tail of the Dragon" from China.

Space Required

Outdoor play area or gymnasium

Appropriate for ages 7-11

Equipment Needed

Two to four ropes to mark boundaries or chalk lines drawn

on the playground.

Directions

Any number of children can play.

Establish boundaries children must stay within.

Select one student to be the "Boa". His/her goal is to catch another child and add to his length. As additional children are added to the "Boa", they must hold hands with the "Boa", but their free hand is used to catch another classmate.

The "Boa" may be split into smaller boas to snare runners, but a unit must always be composed of no less than two players.

When only one runner is left. He/she becomes the new "Boa".

(Orlick 1978)

## Pin

This is a cooperative game played by Indian children in Guatemala.

Space Required

Outdoor play area, gymnasium or open classroom area

Appropriate for ages 7-11

Equipment Needed

A wooden or plastic pin like a bowling pin, a lead ball, small balls or marbles for each player

Directions

Set the pin at a moderate distance from a throwing line. The group can decide the distance. Have the first player roll his ball. The objective is to touch the pin without tipping it over.

Subsequent team members roll their balls so that they nudge the lead ball closer to the pin.

After the pin is touched or falls, play begins again with a new leader.

(Orlick 1978)

## Together-Air Ball
## (Collective Score Volleyball)

In the 1800's the Caribou Eskimo played an early version of this game using a ball made of sealskin. The object is to keep the ball in motion without letting it touch the ground.

Space Required

Outdoor play area or gymnasium

Appropriate for ages 7-12

Equipment Needed

A ball; a line, a rope or a net

Directions

Divide the playing area into two equal courts and have half of the children on each side. A rope, a line, or a net may be used to separate each group.

Bat the ball back and forth in a continuous manner.

Count one point every time anyone hits the ball. Once the ball touches the ground, the counting starts over.

Team members from both sides can also chant out loud the number of consecutive hits. Pupils should keep a collective score.

It is a good idea to start this game with a balloon or beach ball before using a kickball or volleyball.

(Orlick 1978)

## Antelope in the Net

This is an example of a games from the Congo based on the

importance of skill and cunning in trapping food. Sudanese children play a similar game entitled "Hyena and Sheep".

Space Needed

Outdoor play area

Appropriate for ages 7-10

Equipment Needed

None

Directions

From ten to thirty children can play.

After one child is chosen as the antelope, the others form a net (circle) around him. They hold hands and chant "Kasha Mu Bukondi! Kasha Mu Bukondi!"

The antelope tries to break out of the net by crawling under, climbing over, or running against the tightly-joined hands.

When he escapes, he is pursued by the others.

The player who catches the antelope becomes the new antelope and the game begins again.

(McWhirter 1970)

## Helping Harvest the Land

This game is symbolic of the cooperative efforts in farming and communal living found in the People's Republic of China.

Space Required

Playground outdoors
Appropriate for ages 7-8

Equipment Needed

Each team needs a garden hoe, cardboard or plastic flowers, 1 watering can, a basket, and a tricycle

Directions

Group players into teams of four members.

Equipment for each team is placed at the far end of the playground and the teams line up at the opposite end.

The first team member runs to his team's equipment, picks up the hoe and hoes the ground five times then runs back.

The second team member plants the flowers and runs back.

The third team member waters the flowers and returns.

The fourth team member picks the flowers, places them in a basket, and rides the tricycle back taking the flowers to market.

(Orlick 1978)

In-and-Out-the Windows

This is a childhood favorite from Iceland which is played around the world.

Space Required

Outdoor playground or gymnasium

Appropriate for ages 6-8

Equipment Needed

Record player or tape recorder and a favorite children's song or instrumental music.

Directions

Place ten or more children in a circle, hands joined.

Select one player to go to the center of the circle to be "It." Have the other players raise their joined hands above their heads.

Start the music. Have "It" weave his way in and out between the pairs of upraised arms.

When the music stops, "It" should step in front of the player nearest to him. Have both children join hands and move together weaving their way in and out of the circle.

When the music stops again, the two children should step in front of the two players nearest them. Have the four children join hands in a chain-like formation and weave in and out "the windows". The game proceeds until no one is left in the circle.

(McWhirter 1970)

## Yurt Circle

This game derives its name from the ingenious tent of the Mongolian nomads who live in the People's Republic of China. The roof of the tent pushes against the walls to achieve equilibrium. This enables the structure to stand.

Space Required

Outdoor playground

Appropriate for ages 9-12

Equipment Needed

None

Directions

Form a circle using an even number of players.

Have students face the center and stand almost shoulder to shoulder holding hands.

Go around the circle designating one player "In", the next player "Out", and so on. When the process is complete, each "In" should be between two "Outs" and vise versa.

On the count of three all of the "Ins" should lean toward the center of the circle while the "Outs" lean backwards. Feet should be kept stationary and players should support themselves with their hands.

Once stable, try counting to three and have the "Ins" and "Outs" exchange roles. Pupils must keep holding hands at all times.

(Orlick 1978)

## Spin the Dreidel

The dreidel has been a childhood favorite of Jewish children through the centuries especially during the eight days of Hanukkah. Traditionally the dreidel is made of wood or lead, but more elaborate examples exist in silver. Most of these were produced in nineteenth-century Europe. This is a modified version of the original dreidel game.

Space Require

May be played anywhere.

Appropriate for ages 7-8

Equipment Needed

A dreidel, or an ordinary top can be used. Paper and pencil for recording scores.

Directions

Use a plate as a guide and draw a circle on a piece of paper or on the ground.

Mark the circle into eight equal pie-shaped wedges and number each section from 1-8.

Have the first player place the dreidel in the center of the circle and spin. If it lands on the wedge marked "5", that is the players first score.

Player two continues in the same manner recording his/her score.

The game continues until all players have had 5-6 turns. The winner is the one with the highest score.

(McWhirter 1970)

## Blanket Toss

This is an Inuit (Eskimo) game. The blanket is sewn from

walrus hides. Each participant strives to land on his feet and continues until he loses his balance. The winner is the one who can keep his footing the greatest number of tosses. Interestingly, "Pelele" is the Spanish name for this ancient festival game. In Olde England the blanket-toss was a favorite expression of public distemper.

Space Required

Outdoor playground or gymnasium

Appropriate for ages 7-11

Equipment Needed

A sturdy blanket approximately 10 to 12 feet wide or a large circular canvas structure with rope grips around the edges. A parachute is an excellent substitute for either of these items.

Directions

When the Inuit's play this game, an individual sits or stands on the blanket. Substitute a ball or straw man for a children's version of the game, however.

Place twenty or thirty players evenly distributed around the edge of the blanket. Each should have a firm hold on the blanket. Toss the ball or straw man into the air, but keep in mind the goal is to keep the object on the blanket at all times. The blanket responds like a human-powered trampoline.

With younger children a balloon or inflated toy may be used.

(Orlick 1978)

Hopscotch

This is perhaps the most truly internationally enjoyed game for children. It is found in an array of variations throughout the world. Evidence of games of hopscotch have

been found in the ruins of the Roman Forum. This attests to the long standing popularity of the game.

Space Required

Outdoor play area

Appropriate for ages 4-10

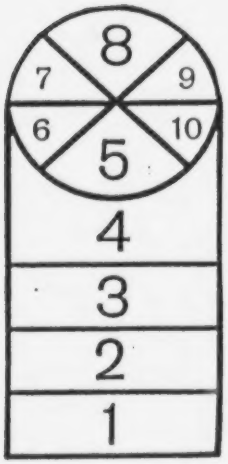
Equipment Needed

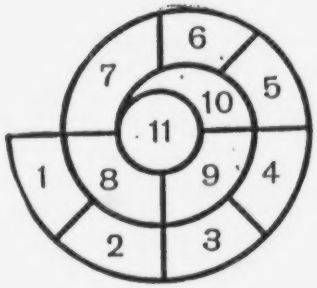
A stick to scratch the diagram into soft group, or chalk for pavement; pebble, a small piece of wood, or a shell as the counter that is called the "potsie" in most English-speaking countries.

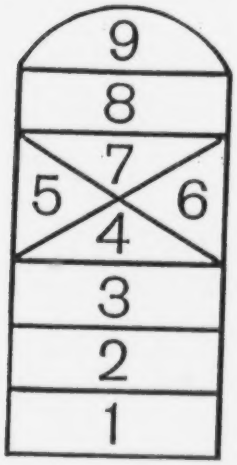
Directions

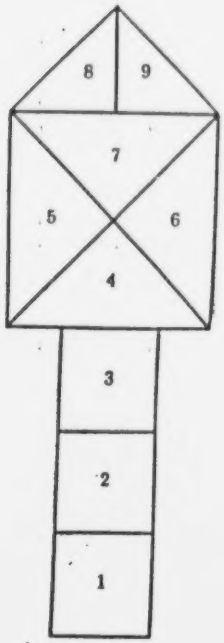
The first player throws his "potsie" into the block marked 1, hops with both feet into 1 and 2 respectively, then hops with one foot into 3, and continues, hopping alternately with one foot and two feet until he reaches 12. He then returns, hopping in the same manner in the opposite direction. If he completes this round successfully without stepping on any lines, this same player aims his "potsie" at 2, hops all the way through the diagram once more as before. The play continues as long as this player is successful and until he has thrown his "potise" into all of the numbered spaces. That player wins who completes the whole round of throws and hops successfully. He loses his turn whenever his "potsie" or a foot lands on a line.

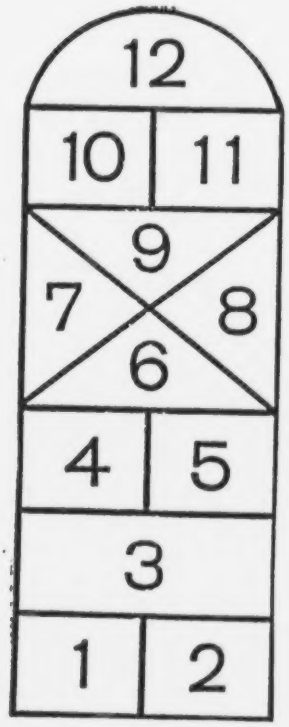
Hopscotch Variations...

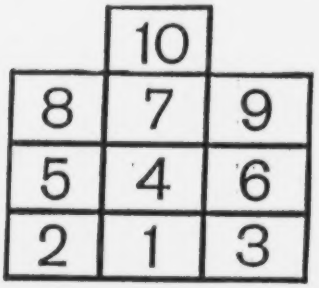


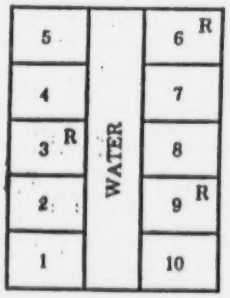




'Send-a-letter' hopscotch gets its name from the envelope shape at the top of the pattern.

The 'water' area in this game is forbidden territory. If a player or his marker goes into the water, the game is over for that player. Blocks 3, 6 and 9 are rest areas.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe children's games from around the world have the potential to broaden pupil's horizons, deepen their insights, and expand their feelings of affinity with the world-wide family. In addition, children's games can be related to pupil's growing knowledge of the wider world, acquired through personal friendships, travel, books, music, and the arts. And finally, if games are viewed as a microcosm of the culture from which they come, they will provide rich insights and understandings about the values of other societies, as well as providing an enlightened view of our own culture.

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